

Phantom Lifeline

By Cleo Brennan

THE Army's III Corps earned its nickname, "The Phantom Corps," during World War II by hitting the enemy when and where it was least expected to do so. Currently headquartered at Fort Hood, Texas, the corps depends on its 13th Corps Support Command to serve as a "lifeline" during deployments. The COSCOM provides virtually all logistical support for the corps.

The annual Phantom Lifeline exercise tests the COSCOM's ability to successfully accomplish its mission as a lifeline to III Corps. A massive effort conducted on a grand scale, the joint exercise involves all components of the nation's armed forces, including the Coast Guard.

Cleo Brennan is a writer on the staff of the Fort Sam Houston News Leader. Soldiers from the 13th COSCOM Public Affairs Office contributed to this report.

Phantom Lifeline 2000 — conducted at several sites across Texas but centered at Camp Bullis, near San Antonio — saw 13th COSCOM troops deployed for two weeks in one of the largest peacetime operations the unit has ever conducted.

Operations at the Texas ports of Corpus Christi and Beaumont replicated the actual stages of deployment by sea for the COSCOM, and Camp Bullis represented their destination, a fictional land called Crayola.

In addition to proving the COSCOM's ability to provide logistical support, the exercise also employed and validated the unit's complex information and communication automation systems. If these systems didn't work well during the exercise, they would have to be redesigned. As it turned out, one of the lessons learned



Soldiers from the 180th Trans. Bn. refuel trucks from one of several convoys that operated during the exercise.



Soldiers of the 13th COSCOM load trucks bound for Camp Bullis onto railcars at Fort Hood, Texas.

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from the exercise was the need for backup systems, in case primary systems fail, said MAJ Glenn Steffenhagen, a 13th COSCOM exercise planner.

Phantom Lifeline 2000 validated all the training conducted by the support command's soldiers during the previous year, said BG Jeanette Edmunds, the 13th COSCOM's commander.

Edmunds said the exercise demonstrated the complexity of preparing for and executing a full-scale deployment.

More than 30 COSCOM units deployed and provided virtually all types of supply and support, including laundry and fabric repair, vehicle and generator maintenance, construction engineering, chemical decontamination and smoke operations.

Medical support for the exercise included a corps support hospital, a forward surgical team and aeromedical evacuation, and even veterinary services for food safety.

The exercise scenario called for a deployment to a country threatened by aggressive neighbors, recent natural disasters, and its citizens' growing distrust of their government.



During the exercise soldiers from the 74th Engr. Co. assembled a Compact 2000 light-weight steel bridge — a design the Army is considering for acquisition.

Dissidents demonstrated against the American presence and carried out terrorist attacks. The Air Force and Marines played a critical role in the evacuation of civilian and military casualties.

"The air piece is the hardest," Steffenhagen said. "We had to syn-

chronize Fort Bragg parachute riggers jumping in, marines coming from Fort Worth and San Antonio, Air Force personnel coming from San Antonio and another unit coming from New Jersey. And they all came in at the right time. The medical evacuation was incredible."

In addition to military units, the exercise was also supported by civilian agencies, Steffenhagen said. COSCOM soldiers worked closely with local police, the Texas Department of Transportation, civilian port authorities and even local labor unions.

SFC Stanford Judkins, a communications planner assigned to the COSCOM headquarters, said the exercise was a success in his case because he learned an enormous amount.

"This exercise was so complex, I learned something every day," Judkins said. "I've been in the Army for 17 years, and this is the most challenging exercise I've ever been a part of." □



Medics from the 13th COSCOM's 1st Med. Bde. transport an "injured" soldier during a Phantom Lifeline mass-casualty exercise.